

New discoveries from Galileo? FCC grants nonfederal access to revolutionary European satellite

16 November 2018

At its [Open Commission Meeting on 15 November](#) the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) approved a [draft order](#) that grants in part the European Commission's long-pending request for waivers of certain FCC licensing requirements to permit nonfederal U.S. receive-only earth stations to operate with specific signals of the Galileo satellite system (Galileo) without having to obtain an FCC license or grant of U.S. market access.

Galileo was developed by the European Union and consists of a number of satellites operating in the radionavigation-satellite service (RNSS), similar to the U.S. Global Positioning System (GPS). The U.S. Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) recommended grant of the requested waivers, and the FCC's International Bureau issued a public notice seeking comment on the potential benefits and technical issues associated with the waiver request. The FCC granted the European Commission waiver request for operations with the Galileo E1 signal (1559-1591 MHz) and E5 signal (1164-1219 MHz), but denied the request for operations with the E6 signal (1260-1300 MHz).

Access to Galileo should benefit the U.S. automotive, transportation, agriculture, and other commercial sectors by allowing U.S. companies to supplement and improve the accuracy of the location data they receive from GPS. The order also resolves a nearly eight year-long controversy involving the FCC, NTIA, U.S. Department of State, and European Commission regarding whether and on what terms to allow access to Galileo in the U.S.

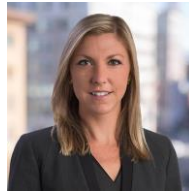
- In 2011 the FCC released a public notice requiring a Part 25 satellite earth station license in order for nonfederal U.S. entities to operate receive-only equipment that receives signals from foreign satellite systems, including Galileo and other RNSS systems. The FCC also stated that it would consider requests for waiver of the requirement based on recommendations from the NTIA and through the FCC's previously established waiver procedures.
- In 2013 the European Commission requested a waiver of the FCC's licensing requirements for receive-only Galileo operations. In its waiver request, the commission sought blanket authorization for all nonfederal U.S. receive-only earth stations to receive signals from Galileo, which transmits in the 1559-1591 MHz (E1), 1164-1219 MHz (E5), and 1260-1300 MHz (E6) spectrum bands.

- In 2015 the NTIA recommended that the FCC seek comment on and ultimately grant the European Commission waiver request. The NTIA also noted that granting the waiver request would augment and strengthen the resiliency of GPS in the U.S., and that use of Galileo would be interoperable with GPS and RF-compatible with U.S. government systems and equipment authorized and operating in the RNSS spectrum bands.
- On 6 January 2017, the FCC issued a public notice inviting public comment on the European Commission's waiver request. Nearly all commenters in the commission waiver proceeding supported the commission's request, including T-Mobile, Trimble, Qualcomm, Airbus Defense and Space, Topcon, Broadcom, National Emergency Number Association (NENA): The 9-1-1 Association, and the European Global Navigation Satellite Systems Agency. However, Inmarsat and Ligado urged the FCC to require the European Commission to provide more information regarding the compatibility of Galileo with U.S. satellite systems before the FCC acted on the request.

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